



It is little wonder that the average Christian is confused and bewildered by much of the theological writing and thinking that is going on today. Even theologians must resort to theological dictionaries to find out what other theologians really mean by their use of terms. In the dust and confusion of battle, Christian soldiers join ranks sometimes with men who are really their enemies, and at other times fire upon men who fail to use the correct watchwords but who really believe the same things.

Take, for example, the name "Adam." Just because a man says he believes in Adam doesn't necessarily mean that he believes what you believe concerning this important Biblical character. Depending on their theological background, people have very different mental pictures when "Adam" is mentioned.

Liberals

During the nineteenth century a new movement began in Protestant Europe called theological liberalism. Its leaders sought to reinterpret the Bible in terms of modern science and philosophy, especially the philosophy of total organic evolution. No longer was it considered up-to-date to think of a God who performed miracles or spoke directly to men. The Bible was simply man's attempt to seek after God. Liberals believe that Adam was a mere figment of pre-scientific Hebrew imagination, a typical attempt by ancient men to spin out stories that would somehow explain the mystery of life and human existence. In other words, the story of Adam was an ancient dream with no foundation in scientific fact. Representatives of this viewpoint are Harry Emerson Fosdick, Nels Ferre, Bishop Pike, and Bishop Robinson (author of *Honest to God*).

Existentialists

In opposition to the smug and complacent liberal theology of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth, existentialism, or Neo-Orthodoxy, gained a powerful grip upon Protestant theologians in Europe following the first world war and in our own country following the second world war. The term "existentialism" refers to the theory that a man's day-to-day experiences are far more vital and real than any ultimate explanations of life and the world. Soren Kierkegaard, a mid-nineteenth-century Danish philosopher, first systematized a "Christian" form of existentialism, and he greatly influenced such recent thinkers as Barth, Brunner, Niebuhr, and Tillich.

These "Christian" existentialists deny that the Bible is the infallible Word of God. However, they insist that God somehow speaks to us through the Bible, and to this extent it is "inspired." While agreeing with the liberals that there never was such a person at the dawn of history as Adam, they would insist that "Adam" is a *genuine myth* through which God conveys real and important truths to men today. Thus, there never was a particular man named Adam who fell into sin from a state of innocence; but this Bible story is important because it is God's way of telling us about ourselves. Each one of us falls short of our God-given spiritual privileges by eating the "forbidden fruit" of pride and complacency and is driven from the "garden" of blessing.

By Dr. John C. Whitcomb, Jr.

Professor of Old Testament
Grace Theological Seminary

February 25, 1967

Theistic Evolutionists

There are many Protestants today who are deeply suspicious of liberalism and existentialism (Neo-Orthodoxy), but who nevertheless are willing to allow modern scientific theories to guide their interpretation of Genesis. Thus, while admitting that there must have been a literal Adam, created in the image of God, they concede that God may have put His spirit into the body of an apelike creature that had been "providentially" evolved for this purpose. To such thinkers, Adam was simply an animal with a human spirit "created" by God a million or more years ago. The leadership of the American Scientific Affiliation (a Christian organization of scientists) is now largely favorable to this interpretation of Adam.

Orthodox Christians

In opposition to the widespread trends within Protestantism to interpret the Bible in terms of current scientific and philosophical theories, orthodox Christians build their life and world view squarely upon the infallible Scriptures. Thus, Adam was not a primitive dream (liberalism), or a God-given myth (existentialism), or a pre-Pleistocene primate with the nature of man (theistic evolution), but a physically perfect man, created as an adult by the supernatural power of God only a few thousand years before Christ. Created sinless, Adam disobeyed God and plunged the entire human race into a state of rebellion against God. Protestants who reject or revise Genesis must someday give an account to the Lord Jesus Christ: "If ye believed Moses, ye would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:46-47, ASV). ▼